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**Appropriations Hearing
Department of Housing
Friday, February 17, 2017**

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and Members of the Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in CT.

My name is Alison Cunningham and I am the CEO of Columbus House, a non-profit serving individuals and families who are homeless in various communities in the state, including Greater New Haven and Middlesex County. I've been in this work for over 20 years, and in the early days, people barely knew what to do about homelessness. We provided shelter and food and that was just about it.

Today, we have a robust system of care that provides so much more than that. Emergency shelter, intensive case management, permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing are the hallmarks of the work that we do at Columbus House along with other providers across the state doing the same thing. It's taken this long to develop such a system that provides a rapid response to homelessness, ensuring that people have access to the emergency and long term services that they need. And we've been able to establish this because of the commitment and investments made by this administration. Governor Malloy and our legislators have long understood the importance of addressing homelessness in CT.

We don't just manage homelessness. As a crisis, it is not something that we should manage it but we should end it. And that has been the goal of agencies in CT for the past few years. Focused, targeted approaches have resulted in CT being the first state to end homelessness among Veterans. And just last month at a press conference, Governor Malloy announced that we have housed or matched to housing everyone who has been verified as chronically homeless.

Governor Malloy has committed funding and resources to helping us reach these goals. When asked at that press conference why he has made such a commitment, his answer was right on target. "Because it saves money". Of course, when people are housed, the cost of expensive emergency and institutional care is greatly reduced. More importantly, people's lives are saved.

I understand that we have some very difficult budget issues in our state which call for hard decision making. But we have done something very special here in our efforts to address the crisis of homelessness, and we can't afford to go backwards.

Preserving state investments will allow us to maintain progress.

The current budget proposal preserves funding for critical housing and homelessness services and supports, including **the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line item, \$73.7 million in FY 18 and \$78.3 million in FY 19**, for frontline housing/homeless services, outreach, emergency shelters, and the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). RAP funds the rental subsidies which make Supportive Housing possible. Supportive Housing continues to be the most effective housing model to assist people experiencing chronic homelessness and is proven to cut public system costs by up to 70%.

The system we have built with your support has resulted in positive outcomes. The number of people homeless in CT continues to decline. People are housed with the important services they need to stay housed. Cuts to these services now could reverse this progress, putting far too many lives at stake. That's why I urge you to protect the funding in the DOH Housing /Homeless Services line item.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alison Cunningham", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alison Cunningham
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